



In criminal identity theft, arrest, passport and Department of Motor Vehicle records may hold valuable evidence. The photo records can prove the true identity of the imposter and show conclusively that it is not the victim. These records also may point to information that establishes how the original information was obtained.

"A lot of times you'll just trip across it by doing good detective work, doing the leg work and someone will say, 'Oh, I used to work with him,' and then there you go — there's your big quote that will hone you in," Mellen said.

But investigators should also remember that they are not the only ones doing research. According to the ITRC, victims typically uncover more evidence in a case than law enforcement and do so more rapidly. Victims have an overwhelming need to be actively involved because it is their reputation and their credit at risk, and their family that will suffer if the ordeal is not cleared quickly. The center recommends that investigators teach victims how to work with them

effectively and communicate effectually with victims.

"Consumers are confused because they cannot get the information they need from law enforcement, so it is important for law enforcement to explain any reason they can't give them that," Farris said about her experiences dealing with identity theft victims. "It is also important for them to explain the process of prosecution or pressing charges."

In order to establish a solid, trusting, effective relationship between the investigator and the victim and to keep the case as straight as possible, Mellen suggests that only one detective handle each identity theft case.

"I think the key to these cases is one person handling them from start to finish, especially when the victim and the suspect are using the same name and you actually identify the suspect," he said. "These cases become so comingled, it really can get messy trying to figure out where the real meets the fake." ■

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The Quick Three

As a quick reference guide to effectively working identity theft cases, officers should:

1. Take a report and classify it under their jurisdiction's identity theft or fraud code.
2. Advise the victim to call the toll-free fraud number of any of the three major credit bureaus to place a fraud alert on their account.
3. Encourage the victim to file a complaint with the Federal Trade Commission using the online complaint form or calling the hotline at 1 (877) ID-THEFT.

The three major credit bureaus are:

Equifax

P.O. Box 740241 / Atlanta, GA 30374
1 (800) 525-6285 / www.equifax.com

Experian

P.O. Box 9554 / Allen, TX 75013
1 (888) 397-3741 / www.experian.com

TransUnion Corp

P.O. Box 6790 / Fullerton, CA 92834
1 (800) 680-7289 / www.transunion.com ■